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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 QUITO 002608

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SUBJECT: ELECTORAL TRAINING EFFORT NOT WITHOUT HICCUPS

REF: A. QUITO 2499

1B. QUITO 2500

11. SUMMARY: A successful October 17 vote depends partly on the 275,000 Ecuadorians manning the polls election day. Training this army is a Herculean task falling to Ecuador's Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE); \$400,000 in USG assistance, channeled through international electoral NGO CAPEL, bolsters the instructional effort. The TSE-CAPEL plan emphasizes a train-the-trainer methodology and enlists the support of the TSE's provincial branches and 30 universities nationwide.

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Poll worker training commenced September 11 and will continue until October 16, one day before the vote. Electoral apathy, especially amongst Ecuador's youth, has complicated the TSE's mission, both in recruitment and education. As of September 23, many training bottlenecks existed on the coast, but few in the highlands. END SUMMARY.

Changes in 2004 Procedures

12. Poloff September 23 visited TSE Training Assistant Ana Patino, a key player in the development of the Tribunal's electoral education plan. Patino offered thanks for the USG's continued support, in words and dollars, of the TSE. The training effort, which commenced in February, was entering the final stretch and she looked forward to its denouement (and a long vacation).

13. The education campaign had begun with selection of workers to staff the voting stations (JRVs). Historically, legions of party members filled the JRVs, an obvious conflict of interest. Even attracting party faithful required financial incentives, however. Predictably, graft and corruption followed, the provincial electoral tribunals (TSPs) not disbursing funds promptly (or at all) to JRV staff. For the 2004 vote, the TSE requested the TSPs to study voter lists, seeking primarily students and educators. The culled lists were then subjected to a specialized TSE computer program that selected the final slate. "Volunteers" will receive either two days paid leave (for government workers) two additional grade points (for students), or a certificate of appreciation (for all others).

14. An experienced Tribunal official, Patino described the greatest training change between Ecuador's 2002 and 2004 elections. Two years ago, the TSPs enjoyed great autonomy in training JRV staff, whether directly or via contractor. Unfortunately, international observers noted great discrepancies in procedures employed, even within the same precinct. To correct this and other shortcomings, the TSE, with USAID financial assistance, contracted CAPEL, the Center for Electoral Promotion and Assistance. While still working closely with the TSPs, CAPEL has enlisted 30 universities and 305 professors to establish teams of trainer-specialists that will actually conduct the JRV education courses. Not surprisingly, many TSPs felt slighted by the change, and have not cooperated fully with their university partners.

The Courses Themselves

15. The JRV course lasts 2-4 hours, depending on trainee aptitude. Approximately 25 percent is theory, 75 percent hands-on -- verifying identity documents, determining vote validity, counting ballots and completing required forms. Training began in 12 provinces September 11 and in the remainder September 13 or 18. Due in equal parts to TSP intransigence, JRV apathy, and TSE delays, the training effort likely will continue until election eve, October 16. Despite these efforts, Patino admitted some JRVs might report for October 17 untrained.

16. She asserted that neither carrot (paid leave and higher grades) nor stick (withholding privileges to JRV no-shows) would increase participation and interest long-term. Rather, Ecuador needed better civic education. Patino claimed the TSE and Education Ministry were drafting a pilot program to

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begin educating elementary school students on democratic

responsibilities.

How it Goes

17. As of September 23, training completion rates in highlands and Amazon provinces, excluding Pichincha (home to capital Quito) were at nearly 70 percent. Ecuador's coastal provinces are lagging, however, especially Guayas (home to Guayaquil), El Oro and Manabi. TSPs there have protested loudly against the TSE/CAPEL changes and are not cooperating with their university partners. The delays worry TSE leaders, Patino claimed, but they are confident they can overcome them by election day (the Manabi province TSP president told visiting Polcouns September 29 that JRV training there would complete by October 2).

18. Media on September 22 reported on another worrisome complication. The Military Geographic Institute (IGM), which prints ballots for all Ecuadorian elections, was allegedly far behind in its production schedules. Patino confirmed the story, but noted similar (and eventually overcome) slowdowns in the run-up to the 2002 vote. The IGM's local election workload was far greater, however, since each province, municipality, and rural canton required unique ballots.

COMMENT

19. We admire the TSE's commitment to training and judge our electoral education assistance well-spent. That said, we hope that, in pulling training "all-nighters" October 16, the TSE remains focused on an equally vital task, preparing

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precincts for the next-day vote. Embassy election observers in 2002 saw JRV openings delayed for lack of basic materials, from masking tape to indelible ink. Preventing a repeat is paramount.
KENNEY